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## Society, security, sovereignty and the state in Somalia

Brons, Maria Helena

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## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

Is the state in modern circumstances a necessary and inevitable form of social organization, one, which once it emerges in a given society, is a permanent fixture? This is the question that will be critically considered in this book. What is meant by the *state* in this context is a political entity comprising a variety of institutions, which exercise control over violence within particular territorial boundaries.

We will consider the specific case of Somalia, which has been without a *state* since 1991. The Somali state collapsed when, at the climax of the civil war at the beginning of 1991, president Siyad Barre, his family and select political entourage were left with no other option than to flee their residence 'Villa Somalia' in the capital Mogadishu. The numerous clan-affiliated factions which had collaborated to take control of most of the country and which finally won the battle for Mogadishu were not able to unite in forming a new government. As a result, the territory of the former Somali state was controlled by different military factions and fell apart, politically, into various territorial units. In 1998, as I finish writing this book, there are a number of different political entities on Somali territory, including the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland in the Northwest and the autonomous regional state of Puntland in the Northeast. There are also numerous locally governed political entities in the South, where different faction leaders exercise politico-military dominance over particular territories, whose boundaries remain unsettled. Sporadic fighting and political maneuvering continue up to the present time.

Although the institutions, which constituted the Somali *state* collapsed, the Somali people continued their life, albeit with patterns of existence other than state-driven socio-economic and political arrangements. Some parts of Somali society seem to have been able to manage quite well without the state. Others, which had suffered under state authority, have seen little improvement in the no-state situation. These phenomena challenge the assumed necessity of modern state institutions to social life.

The focus of the following study is the Somali experience as a society confronting the collapse of the modern state. Throughout the recent stateless years in Somalia political authority formation has taken different forms,

which raises questions about the direction to be taken by future Somali state formation processes. Our empirical analysis of Somali state collapse and state(s) formation is intended as a contribution to the discussion of the modern state, its nature, purpose and future.

### State-Centered Theories of Sovereignty and Security and its Critics

In recent years, the universal validity of the concept of the modern state, in the context of the political, social and economic realities of modern societies has been increasingly called into question. Critics call attention to two developments: a tendency towards global governance and trans-national loyalties and identities on the one hand; and, on the other hand, the increasing political importance of localized structures, reflected in sub-national loyalties and identities. The first trajectory refers mainly to the developed, Western world where the tendency of political and economic decision-making by trans-national bodies, such as witnessed in the context of the European Union Amsterdam Treaty, is widening (Held, 1995, Linklater, 1995). The second trajectory is developed in the context of weak or collapsing states in the Southern part of the world, particularly in Africa (Grindle, 1996; Olukashi and Laakso, 1996, Zartman, 1995). In the light of these developments, the question is often asked whether the state is still necessary, or whether the political institution of the modern state is damned to increasing insignificance. As Linklater (1995: p.178, p.193) notes:

A myriad of factors are currently transforming political communities across the world and, as the century comes to an end, the time is indeed ripe for enunciating new principles of political life which break with the tyranny of the concept of the state. ... The consequent failure to theorize the world outside the state has left the modern political imagination profoundly impoverished.

What, then, should be the starting point of our inquiry? The alternative to a state-centered analysis is to take society as a reference point. In this book, society is defined in a broad way as a conglomeration of people who tend to interact more with each other on social, cultural, economic and political dimensions than they do with those who are not members of the same society. Obviously, such a concept is indeterminate, both in the sense that one can speak both of European society and of French society, for example, and in the sense that the more marginal a member is, the greater his or her interaction with members of other societies. Unlike a state, a society does not necessarily

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have fixed or determinate geographic boundaries and if it does, these do not necessarily coincide with those of any particular state. Society is highly differentiated and a less coherent unit of analysis than the state. Unlike the state, it does not speak as an anthropomorphic entity (Waever, Buzan, Kelstrup, Lemaitre, 1993).

A society is characterized by social integration as well as social fragmentation. Social integration might derive internally from commonly perceived or transmitted ethnic roots, common descent or language. It might go along with political integration in cases where integrated state-society relations prevail. Externally-driven social integration might be stimulated by a commonly perceived enemy. Social fragmentation exists in various forms and multiple layers, such as gender, religion, clan, class and age. Segmentary lineage societies, such as Somali society (Lewis, 1961), can be extremely fragmented into tribes or clans. Nevertheless, close bonds of family and kinship are counterbalanced by strong individualism. The nomadic sector of Somali society, particularly, has an individualistic, egalitarian component. In addition, Somali society has undergone a transformation process whereby lineage fragmentation and the political perceptions of the individual as citizen have become molded into a sometimes contradictory and conflict-prone whole.

Society is continually shaped and re-shaped and is, finally, the product of decisions people make concerning when, how and with whom they interact (Howard, 1993). Social identity patterns, such as ethnic belonging, gender and historical precedent all influence this decision. I will assume that the prevailing and inherently dominant factor in determining people's choices and subsequently identities is the search for relative security.

In the study that follows, the search for security is thus considered the key factor determining political authority formation. Conventional theory in security studies is centered on the state, the dominant political authority in the contemporary world system:

Realism's construction of the possibilities for political order, of the realm of politics, and thus of security yields both an object to secure (the territorially defined political community) and an agent to pursue this end (the state) (Williams and Krause, 1997: p.xiv).

Within such a framework, the institutions that make up a modern state are supposed to play the role of caretaker for a basically integrated society. The basic relation between *state* and *society*, the *raison d'être* of a state, is containment of violence. The principal concern of conventional security studies is the problem of how to contain or control violence, conflict or war between states. State security, however, is threatened not only by other states but also by violence

from within society. Furthermore, violent conflict often evolves from state policies that threaten the security of its population. An approach to security studies that limits itself to the category of state, to peace and security between states, cannot grasp the multitude of phenomena of conflict and insecurity.

In contrast to the conventional approach to security studies a debate has developed that takes a critical perspective *vis-à-vis* the state-centric line of thought. According to the critical security approach, both the *object* ("the territorially defined political community", see the quotation above) and the *agent* ("the state") need to be scrutinized when defining the possibilities for political order, the realms of politics and of security.

Moving towards a society-centered analysis of political order involves re-thinking not only the role of the state, but also the related concept of sovereignty. When taking up Linklater's challenge to "theorize the world outside the state" (see p.26), we must therefore also theorize sovereignty independently from the state. We can do this by reconsidering the theoretical link between security and sovereignty as expressed in normative theories of state formation by consent, which trace the genesis of sovereign authority to consent given by members of society. According to the consent theory, sovereign authority is granted for and therefore conditional upon the provision of security to those who vest political authority in the 'sovereign'. The link between security and sovereignty, therefore, ultimately derives from the people who participate in building a society – the social unit in which the origin of sovereignty lies.

In the theoretical framework that I develop for the analysis of the Somali case I link the debate on security with that on sovereignty and state-formation. I assume that the political concept of sovereignty is not satisfactorily described as indivisible state sovereignty, but must be seen as divided between various security agents within and outside society. State formation can only be sustainable if the state as one institution among others proves to be the superior security-providing agency for society.

With these considerations in mind, an analysis of the Somali case – of a people that moved from statelessness, through state formation and collapse, back to statelessness and further to new kinds of political authority formation – can contribute to contemporary discussions about political community, state formation and the future of the state as the most prominent institution for political order. In the analysis that follows, I intend to draw on society-centered security studies, which consider the modern state framework as just one option for society in the search for relative security and for the investment of political authority and sovereignty. At the end of the analysis I will return to the question whether, in the light of the Somali experience, a shift in the security debate from the conventional to a critical security approach might prove promising.

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## The Collapse of the Somali State

A functional as well as an institutional definition of the state guides the analysis of the Somali experience that follows. The primary function of the state is considered to be security provision, and throughout the case study we will be asking how the Somali state performed in that function. In exercising this particular role, the ideal state both serves and is controlled by society.

Drawing on the Weberian definition of the state, Buzan (1991) suggests a triad of component parts of any state: (1) the idea of the state; (2) the physical base of the state, i.e. its territory and population; and (3) the institutional expression of the state. The first pillar of the state – the idea of a state – is reflected in its underlying political identity. “The notion of purpose is what distinguishes the idea of the state from its physical base and its institutions” (ibid.: p.69-70). Buzan refers, in this respect, both to different variants of nation-states, and to their organizing ideologies, such as political, economic, religious or social ideologies. With regard to the second component – the physical base of the state, including territorial borders, and the population, natural resources and man-made wealth within these borders – the size of its population is seen as more influential than the size of its territory in determining the permanence of a state. State territory is the most specific of the three state components, and the international system relies on territorial demarcations of states. State territory can be threatened by other states and/or by claims for independence or separatist movements within the state. The third component, the institutional expression of the state, comprises “the entire machinery of government, including its executive, legislative, administrative and judicial bodies, and the laws, procedures and norms by which they operate” (ibid.: p.82).

The Buzan triangle of state components enables us to develop a classification of states in terms of different threats and weaknesses. The ideology of the state, its territorial integrity, or its major institutions, can all be threatened. The state can be weak in its institutional framework (particularly with regard to control over the use of force), or in the cohesive idea, which should bind state and society, or because of an inappropriate population/territory ratio or unsettled territorial boundaries.

It is important not to reify the state as some kind of autonomous entity. In this context we read in Weber (1968):

Thus, for instance, one of the important aspects of the existence of a modern state, precisely as a complex of social interaction of individual persons, consists in the fact that the action of various individuals is oriented to the belief that it exists or should exist, thus that its acts and laws are valid in the

legal sense. ... A "state", for example, ceases to exist in a sociologically relevant sense whenever there is no longer a probability that certain kinds of meaningfully oriented social action will take place (Ibid.: p.14, p.27).

It is people who bring a state to life or let it collapse, who exist before the state and who finally determine whether a given political entity is considered a state. In the Somali case the three constituent parts – the idea of the state, the physical base of the state (territory and population), and the institutional expression of the state – all collapsed.

## THE IDEA OF THE STATE

The idea of the state, reflecting its political identity and the bond between society and state, in other words, the leading ideology propagated by the Somali state leadership, was, in retrospect, threefold.

*First*, the 'Greater Somalia' quest for the unification of all Somali-inhabited territories in the Horn within one nation-state was a sacrosanct idea for the early post-colonial state. After 1969, the socialist Somali state, too, relied on the idea of 'Greater Somalia' to rally people behind its policies (Laitin and Samatar, 1987). 'Greater Somalia' lost momentum after Somalia's defeat in the Ethiopian-Somali war over the Ethiopian-Somali borders, known as the Ogaden-war, in 1977/78.

*Second*, scientific socialism – *Hanti-wadaagga 'ilmi ku disan*, literally 'sharing wealth based on wisdom' – was officially announced as the ideology of the state on the first anniversary of the Revolution in 1970 (Lewis, 1988; Samatar, 1988). Together with it went the political goal of eradicating tribalism within Somali society: people were no longer allowed to address each other as cousins or brothers (*walaal*), but only as comrades (*jaale*); the *aqil*, the head of a clan-lineage and mediator between state and traditional political authority during colonial times, was renamed *nabad doon*, literally meaning 'peace-maker'. However, these socialist ideals, if ever a genuine goal, faded away with the increasing decay of Somali state politics into coercion, ruthless state terrorism and the perfecting of sophisticated tactics of *divide and rule* based on clan antagonisms (Africa Watch, 1990).

*Third*, the bond between Somali society and state was based on the perception of Somalia in the way that it came to be portrayed, by Somali politicians as well



as by foreign and Somali academic analysts and political commentators, as an ethnically homogeneous nation of camel nomads.<sup>1</sup> In the ideological vacuum of the recent stateless years (since 1991) this perception has been increasingly challenged by Somali and non-Somali scholars, who stress the diversity within Somali society and who have unveiled the history of domination of nomadic Somali over sedentary Somali (Mohamed Safih and Wohlgemuth, 1994a; Ahmed, 1995a). The critique points out how the myth of Somali origin, which classifies the Somali people as being in between African and Arab (see Mukhtar, 1995; Kusow, 1995; Ahmed, 1995b), was politicized and became a tool of political power in the hands of clans with a nomadic background. The collapse of the state in 1991 revealed the fundamental crisis of Somali political and social identity, a crisis reflected in the breakdown of social conscience and the apocalyptic experiences of a cruel civil war.

## STATE TERRITORY

The physical base of the Somali state, combining territory and population, also collapsed – if it ever really existed. It is widely recognized that state borders on the African continent often have little to do with underlying socio-geographic realities. This also applies to the Horn of Africa and the Somali region in particular. In colonial times the Somali region was divided amongst Italy (South, Central and Northeastern region), Britain (North and Southwest), France (Northwest) and Ethiopia (West). In 1960, the newly independent British Somaliland and the UN Trusteeship-territory under Italian administration united to form the Republic Somalia, while the Northern Frontier District stayed with Kenya,<sup>2</sup> the Ogaden, Eastern Hararghe and Bale regions remained part of Ethiopia and, in 1977, French Somaliland finally became Djibouti. The territorial base of the Somali state, therefore, never reflected the territorial base of Somali society or the Somali-inhabited areas in the Horn. This is where the origin of demands for a 'Greater Somalia' lies.

The physical base of the state generally refers to the legal definition of state territory in international law (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982). In this sense, and

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1 One example of many is Laitin and Samatar (1987).

2 Kenya became independent in 1963. In a referendum shortly before independence, a majority in the Northern Frontier District, the Somali-inhabited areas in Northeastern Kenya, voted for integration into Somalia. British colonial authorities ignored the referendum (Farah, 1993).



despite its physical collapse it seems that the Somali state is still internationally recognized. Although there has been no central government in Somalia since 1991, the UN and other international organizations still consider the borders of the ex-Somali state as a reference point for their policies towards Somalia. The UN strategy, particularly during the UNOSOM operations, as well as the attitude of foreign governments towards the Somali question, is reflected in their reaction to the proclamation of independence by Somaliland (the Northwestern territory, former British Somaliland Protectorate) in May 1991 (Brons, 1993). Although external actors respect the existence of the 'Northern authorities' as legitimate political authorities, Somaliland still awaits international recognition. In spite of this anomaly, however, there is no doubt that the Somali state (1960-1991) collapsed territorially in 1991, with its population and *territory divided into several entities.*

Apart from the connotation of 'state-territory', territoriality in the Somali context has another dimension. The agro-pastoral and pastoral clans, in particular, move according to climatic conditions and the needs of their herds for water and pasture. Their territories are defined according to the pastoral way of life that has little to do with international law, whose rules of the game were set by colonial powers. Thus, for about a century, international borders have divided Somali clan territories. The lands of the Southern agricultural clans also stretch across international borders into Ethiopia. Yet – and this may be different from other cases in Africa – despite international borders, clan territories are very much integrated in the economic, social and political life of the Somali. The Somali conceptualization of territoriality as derived from geographic, economic and trading patterns also impacts on settlement patterns and social and political norms and perceptions. In terms of territoriality, one could speak today of three distinct territories in the Somali-inhabited areas of the Horn. (See maps 1 and 2). These are: (1) the Northwestern region including the 'Somali part' of Djibouti, Somaliland and the Northwestern part of the Somali 'region 5' in Ethiopia; (2) the South, stretching from the Somali-inhabited Northeastern Moyale district in Kenya in the West to the Southern edge of the Ethiopian region 5 in the North, up to the *areas just beyond* the Shabelle river in the East; and (3) the Central and Northeastern region making up the tip of the Horn and stretching into Southern Ethiopia. As will be shown later, these regions are political as well as economic units as a result of family/clan connections, pastoral movement and trade.

Although we will, of course, return to questions of territory in the rest of this study, these remarks should be sufficient to highlight some of the contradictions involved in a legal approach to Somali state-territory and the relative

insignificance of state territorial boundaries for the life of the common Somali people.

## STATE INSTITUTIONS

State institutions, which carried the executive, legislative and judicial powers of the Somali state, stopped functioning in 1991. Government employees, most of who were in one way or another related to the politically powerful clans dominating the Siyad Barre regime, fled from violence that was fuelled by emotions of hatred and revenge. Government offices, ministries, the National Bank, army and police, courts, postal services and educational institutions disintegrated. Indeed, not only did the state institutions cease to function, but also buildings and equipment were looted beyond recognition. Arms, money, office files, books, furniture, technical apparatus, telephones and wires, water-pipes, roofs, window-frames – everything was taken, sold or destroyed. The extreme devastation of the institutional framework of the Somali state must be taken into account when state reconstruction on Somali soil is discussed.

State territory, state institutions and various ideas/ideologies were expected to build the bond between Somali society and state, but collapsed and proved to have been weak social constructions all along. So what did survive? Life went on in Somalia in a situation of statelessness. Members of Somali society turned to alternative security arrangements, most of which had existed side by side or in conjunction with state institutions. If such security arrangements, rooted in the non-state social sphere, prove superior to those that a proto-state can provide, especially in the sensitive task of controlling the means of violence, then is it possible that Somalis might prefer to continue living without a conventional state institutional framework (Doornbos and Markakis, 1994)? Alternatively, is it possible that previously non-state institutions of security provision will be transformed into state institutions? Such a process would reflect a bottom-up dynamic of institution building and an essentially consensus-based attempt at state formation. A third scenario envisages a top-down state formation process (perhaps externally driven) that would bring (parts of) Somali society under state control.

Somali society is not static but flexible and rich in variety, that is reflected in categories of clan and class, in regional differences of economic production patterns, of language, tradition and history. In addition, Somali society today is divided between those who live abroad as international migrants and those who stayed at home in the region. This background gives rise to the question of who in Somali society is in favor of reconstituting a state, and what kind of a



state. Military faction leaders, former civil servants, businessmen and traders, educated women, farmers in the South and nomads in the North, all have different and sometimes conflicting visions about structures and functions of a future Somali state.

In the light of the various options with which Somali society is confronted, I intend critically to evaluate the post-1991 attempts at and processes of state formation within the territory of ex-Somalia.

## Objectives of the Study

This book is intended to provide a contribution to three interrelated fields of inquiry. Firstly, it offers an account of the impact of state formation, state collapse and renewed state formation processes on the Somali people, highlighting their heterogeneity rather than their homogeneity.<sup>3</sup> Findings are based on my own field research in the broader Somali region as well as in Nairobi and Addis Ababa during the years 1986, 1991/92 and 1996/97. The characterization of past and contemporary Somali society is based on a wealth of literature on Somali society, history and politics as well as on works, in particular those by Somali social scientists that reflect new trends in re-reading the past and analyzing the present. In this context, I have endeavored to include the literature, which reflects the 'fresh wind' blowing in Somali studies, breaking away from

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3 Recent publications show how the image of homogeneity is sustained; if the farming communities are mentioned at all, they are portrayed as Somali minorities or as non-Somali. "In general, the Somali people share a common language (Somaale), religion (Islam), physical characteristics, and pastoral and agropastoral customs and traditions" (Adam, 1995: p.70). Again: "For centuries before the European colonial era, Somalia was a pastoral and nomadic society. Herders of camels, cattle and sheep lived in a world of 'egalitarian anarchy' where the main preoccupation of clan families was the well-being of the herd. With the exception of small Bantu communities along the Juba and Shebelle Rivers, there were no ethnic or religious minorities. It was a singular homogeneous culture that in theory should have come into the modern era in a cohesive and stable way. ... From the tenth century on, ethnic Somalis were dispersed throughout the Horn of Africa in a continuous search for forage and water for their herds. In the riverine area between the Juba and Shebelle, a small number practised maize and millet agriculture, and a small trading class along the coast maintained contact by sea with the Arab Peninsula" (Hirsch and Oakley, 1995: p.3).

stereotyped accounts of Somali society.<sup>4</sup> In this way I hope to contribute to the academic debate in the field of Somali studies.

The second field is that of critical security studies. The Somali experience, a case where open state collapse has taken place, offers a challenging opportunity for study in the light of the premises of critical security studies. This book is intended to make a contribution to this endeavor.

The third contribution, which this study hopes to give, is to the discussion concerning external intervention. By integrating a trans-national security-provision dimension into the analysis of Somali state-formation processes, it provides themes for a critical evaluation of the impact of external involvement on internal political processes in Somalia. I am referring not only to UN involvement in peacemaking, peace-enforcement and humanitarian intervention,<sup>5</sup> or to short-term emergency relief, but also to the long-term impact of international involvement. The awareness of international agencies and foreign governments needs to be raised with regard to the dangers of external involvement (including in the choice of participants for negotiations)<sup>6</sup> for the political balance of the no-state situation in Somalia.

### Structure of the Book

Following this introduction, the book begins by developing an analytical framework that will guide the reader through the study of the Somali experience (chapter 2). The first part of chapter 2 elucidates two analytical approaches to state formation reflecting bottom-up and top-down dynamics and borrowing from the philosophical consent theory and the historical force theory of the origin of the state. The second part of the chapter focuses on a reconceptualization of the term 'sovereignty'. Challenges to the paradigm of state sovereignty from within and beyond society are discussed, and the argument is made for an analytical shift from undivided state sovereignty to divided sover-

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4 Among these are Ahmed (1995a) and Besteman and Cassanelli (1996). Not included are French, Italian, Arabic and non-translated Somali literature. German literature is used to a limited extent.

5 The UN intervention in Somalia is dealt with in Brons (1997).

6 Interview with Gian Paolo Aloï, the Head of the Local Administration Structures Unit at the United Nations Development Office for Somalia (UNDOS), Nairobi, 9 October 1997. He considered finding and choosing the 'right' interlocutors one of the most difficult tasks in the no-state situation in Somalia.



eighty beyond the state. The third part of the chapter concentrates on the term 'security' and the way it is conceptualized in conventional and in critical security studies. Security, it is argued, needs to be conceptualized broadly, looking beyond military/strategic considerations to include economic, social and environmental factors. Like 'sovereignty', it must also refer to sub-state and trans-state spheres that interact with the state. In this way, the linkages between local, national, regional and international security can be drawn. Conditions for sustainable state formation are seen to obtain where the state institutional framework is considered to be the *primus inter pares* option for the provision of security. The last part of chapter 2 summarizes the analytical framework and elucidates the methodology applied in the Somali case study.

Chapters 3 and 4 describe Somali society in a situation of statelessness. Chapter 3 provides an introduction to Somali geography, subsistence and economy, while chapter 4 concentrates on a description of Somali identity and society, in which reference is made to anthropological and historical material as well as to contemporary accounts of the characteristics of the Somali people.

In chapter 5, a link is established between theory and the specific case. Referring back to the methodological considerations at the end of chapter 2, I give an overview of relative security providing social arrangements that shows the various dimensions of (in)security which have been prominent in stateless Somali society.

Chapters 6 and 7 are taken up with the analysis of the Somali state(s). Chapter 6 looks at the impact of colonial state policies on Somali society and at Somali state formation attempts that developed in response to colonial occupation. Chapter 7 analyses the period since independence, including the independent Somali state (1960-1969), and the socialist state which was formed after the *coup d'état* in 1969, and which finally collapsed in January 1991. It addresses a number of questions: the degree of security, or insecurity, which these states provided to different parts of Somali society; the sources of sovereignty which the states could claim; and how other non-state security networks performed in reaction to state policies. The chapter then deals with the results of increasingly dictatorial state policies, leading to the development of political opposition in Somalia and to declining state authority. It describes the slide into open civil war, state collapse and ensuing statelessness.

Chapter 8 deals with the period of statelessness in Somalia from 1991 onwards. It examines the networks, which were activated in order to deal with violence and to secure survival, and economic and political stability. In the first part of the chapter, the political economy of continuous violence in the Southern areas, the weaknesses and strengths of sub-state mechanisms *vis-à-vis* this violence, and the performance of the international security network in

the form of the UN involvement in Somalia are discussed. The second part of the chapter focuses on the processes of political authority formation that took place in the post-collapse years. The cases of Somaliland, the Digil Mirifle Governing Authority and Puntland are used to analyze perceptions and problems with regard to territoriality, the emergence of cohesive ideas and ideologies within these polities and the performance of political authorities with regard to the control of violence. This brings us back to the three pillars of the state – territory and population, idea, and institutions – and asks how the political/state authorities described in the chapter measure up in these areas.

In a concluding chapter (chapter 9), the findings deriving from the case study are linked back to the theoretical discussion in the early chapters of the book. Does the Somali experience offer insights that are relevant for the formulation of a critical approach to security studies and a theory of divided sovereignty? And – as theory and practice are considered mutually influencing – does a society-based theoretical approach to security and sovereignty provide a suitable framework for analyzing cases of hidden and open state collapse?